

Runes and Roman

Germanic Literacy and the Significance of Runic Writing

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ideologies and motivations that made runes appear on Scandinavian and English presses until the end of eighteenth century, as well as the difficulties involved in printing a non-roman script. I will consider especially the contributions of the Danish scholar Ole Worm, whose works on runes have been little discussed in English-language criticism despite their widespread and long-lasting influence throughout Europe, and the English antiquarian Thomas Percy, whose ideas were deeply inspired by Worm's theories. Percy's studies of runes have not been generally noted despite the fact that they define an important moment in the rediscovery of Britain's vernacular past.

BEFORE PRINT, RUNES WERE USED IN SOUTHERN SCANDINAVIA and in Britain as monumental inscriptions and for writing on objects of wood or metal. Although runes were used only sporadically during the late Middle Ages, the dominance of the roman alphabet on the printing presses (whether in the form of black letter, antiqua, serif and others) dealt the final death-blow to the runic alphabet as a mode of communication during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. However, prior to printing, runes had not been entirely absent from books. Scattered evidence that runes had been used as manuscript book hand raised the possibility that a literate and learned Germanic past had existed, independent of Roman culture and Latin learning. In the seventeenth century, this possibility was welcomed in the spirit of national awakening and an emergent antiquarian revivalist movement for a glorious Germanic past. Runes began to appear in connection with the printing of literary and mythological texts. This article will focus on developments relating to the printing of runes from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. I will argue

that runes were revived in printed books as part of a nationalist interest in the vernacular past. However, the originals of the runic material that was printed sometimes had no existence outside of print. Errors about the age and spread of runes were perpetuated and magnified out of the zeal to make runic writing a totem of vernacular pride.

Runes and their Uses

We will first turn briefly to consider the origin and use of the runic alphabet before printing. Recent studies date the runic alphabet to the second century A.D. The discoveries of inscriptions indicate that the place of origin was most likely southern Scandinavia (STOKLUND 2003). Runic writing is an angular script consisting of simple strokes known as staves specifically devised for inscription on hard surfaces, such as wooden sticks, stones, or various metals. The letters were shaped to emphasize straight lines, avoiding horizontal strokes that would run along the grain of the wood. The use of runes seems primarily to have been for the purpose of inscribing ownership on objects or for magic formulas. The modern rune scholar James E. Knirk (1993, 551) explains the choice of roman rather than runic alphabets as one that partially depended on the type of message intended: “notes of temporary significance were inscribed with runes on pieces of wood, whereas texts of more permanent character [. . .] was written in Roman letters on parchment”.

Despite this, rune forms can be found in medieval manuscript writing. If we look at the Anglo-Saxon tradition, scribes regularly used two runic letters: *wynn* (ƿ), representing the sound /w/, and *thorn* (þ), representing /θ/. Runic signs were also used for abbreviations where the name of the rune could conveniently replace a common word. For example, the rune *ēpel* (“home”, “possession”) appears in *Beowulf* (c. 141v of British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv) in the meaning of “native land”. A similar meaning is indicated when the same rune sign is used in the Old English poem *Waldere* (Copenhagen, Royal Library, Nye Kongelige Samling MS 167b, Fragment I). The rune *man* (“human”, “man”) appears in verse 23 of *The Ruin* (c. 141r of the Exeter Book). This and the rune *dæg* (“day”) are quite common in the glosses to the Durham Ritual and Lindisfarne Gospels. Sometimes they even appear with added inflectional endings in roman letters (PAGE 1999, 77–78). Although modern editions of these texts are often printed with the original Old English, the runes are seldom represented, testifying to the triumph of roman letters on early printing presses.

The etymology of the word “rune” and the practices associated with it have produced an enormous body of scholarship. Runes seem to have played a role in pagan practices and magical rituals. The noun *rune* is etymologically connected with the meaning of “secret”, or “mystery”. What this meant is widely debated. Christine Fell has argued that since Old English sources cite *run* mainly in the Christian sense. Thus, one may understand it as what is unknown or difficult to comprehend: the Christian mystery to be revealed through preaching (FELL 1991). But, for both Chaucer and Shakespeare (ELLIOT 1998, 662), the word had developed to express a sense of secret information whispered around. The link to magic practices is upheld in the *First Poetical Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, a fragmentary poem in the Parker Library, Cambridge (MS 422), there is a description of the magical properties of the letters used in the Latin Pater Noster. The poet supplies these letters with a runic equivalent and concludes with a description of how these signs can enhance the efficacy of a weapon if carved upon it. The link between runes and magic, which is evident here, was both the reason why they disappeared from common use in Christian Europe and a reason why the letters were taken up again in the fervent climate of early modern mysticism. The reasons why runes found their way into print will be discussed below.

Runes on the Early Presses

When runes first appeared on the printing presses, they were seen as objects of study, not as a vehicle for communication. Runes were rediscovered as part of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fascination with all kinds of writing systems: Chinese and hieroglyphics, Hebrew and Greek, as well as the secret language of the Rosicrucians. Emphasis in these works was primarily on the systems themselves and their uses as mystical codes. What the letters communicated was of secondary importance.

One of the first to illustrate a runic alphabet in a printed book was the German polymath Johannes Trithemius. His *Polygraphiae* (1508) traced the history of polygraphic systems from its origins in ancient Egypt into Christian times. Most of the book consists of lists of code letters and their equivalents. It included a runic alphabet, referred to as “Alphabetum Nortmannorum”. In the early days of print, it was not always understood that runes belonged to an area we can today describe as north-Germanic. Some runic material circulated in early printed books under names of “Syriac” or “Arabic”. For instance, Theseus Ambrosius, a grammarian of Padua,

printed a runic alphabet in his *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam* (1539) under the heading “Alphabetum Saracenorum” (DEROLEZ 1954, xxxiv).

In the second phase of printing runes, the alphabet was taken up as part of a cultural revival in the North with a very specific Germanic orientation. A seminal book in this respect was the Swedish scholar Olaus Magnus’ study of “northern peoples”, *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*, printed in Rome in 1555. This book contains 476 chapters, lavishly illustrated with 481 woodcuts, including a plate of runic alphabet designated as “Alphabetum Gothicum”.¹ Magnus’ book found an enthusiastic audience throughout Europe. It was translated into several languages, with an English translation in 1658 (albeit without the illustrations). Magnus was an inspirational figure for the cultural movement known as Gothicism (*Göticism*). This movement sought to aggrandize the Germanic, and especially, the Scandinavian past.

Magnus made great claims for the runes; he believed they were characters that chronologically preceded roman letters. Runic writing was used to argue that the Gothic people had been both literate and learned from the earliest times. However, his challenge to the priority of Latin culture was somehow vitiated by the further claim that a race of giants, who once inhabited the land, had inscribed the runes on monumental stones throughout the Swedish landscape (MAGNUS [1555] 1972, 57).

I propose that the Gothicist interest in runes can be divided into two strands: a) *pragmatic* study, where the purpose was to achieve knowledge about the alphabet and how the messages written in this alphabet should be deciphered, and b) *metaphysical* understanding, for which the main goal was to reveal the mystical and spiritual properties believed to be inherent in the signs.²

Under the metaphysical paradigm, exalted claims were made for runes. One of the foremost national philologists of the sixteenth century was the Danish scholar Anders Sørensen Vedel, who published a translation of Saxo Grammaticus’ thirteenth-century history of Denmark in 1575. On a portrait painted by Tobias Gempeler, Vedel is shown surrounded with inscriptions in four ancient alphabets: the three biblical alphabets (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) and runes. Evidently, Vedel and his painter

1. *Gothic* was at this time used in an extended sense for Teutonic or Germanic.

2. I borrow this distinction from what has been proposed in regard to seventeenth-century scholarship of the two *EDDAS*; see MALM 1996, 29–32.

wanted to suggest that runes represented an equally ancient, if not sacred, language.³

More than anyone else the antiquarian Johannes Bureus (1568–1652), royal librarian, tutor and advisor to King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, epitomizes the metaphysical engagement with runic writing. His study of the ancient alphabet was colored with the brush of Rosicrucian mysticism, esoteric illumination, and astrological speculation. Bureus' central claim was that an ancient wisdom of the Hyperboreans (according to Greek mythology, a legendary people living beyond the north wind) was preserved in the runes. Thus, the study of the alphabet could ensure salvation to those who could truly decipher its hidden meaning (ÅKERMAN 1998, 28). It would be a mistake, however, to think that runes were used only as ciphers for mystical contemplation. I will argue that the metaphysical interest came to serve a myth-making that promoted the legacy and achievement of vernacular culture.

For Bureus, the Nordic runes were endowed with properties and a past that not only challenged Latin culture as the only arbiter of civilization, but also outshone it. He also invented his own runic system to be used for Kabalistic magic. This practice led to accusations of heresy, for which he was acquitted, however, by means of King Gustavus' protective intervention.

Bureus also published an important gazetteer on rune monuments in Sweden: *Monumenta Sveogothica* (1624). He was behind a serious attempt to revive runes as modern printed alphabet. In fact, the first writing book for school children in the Swedish vernacular was Bureus' *Runa ABC boken*, published in Stockholm in 1611. The pages of this book put on view a number of different fonts (fraktur, schwabacher, antiqua, and runes) intended as reading practice to familiarize children with various typefaces that they might encounter. But, as it is clear from the title, runes were the focus of the lessons.

Bureus was a skilled typesetter, and he most likely cut the punches to make the letter forms. On the title page of *Runa ABC boken*, Bureus proclaims that all spelling books printed in the following years must contain runes and that he had obtained a royal privilege on such publications. The book was reissued under a new title the following year. However, printing conventions favored roman types, and Sweden did not continue any tradition of runes in elementary books of learning, or as a common print font. The example of Bureus shows that an interest in runes for their ability to illuminate the inner soul and an interest in runes for ethnic and national

3. See the relevant plate and analysis in JENSEN 1995, 29.

reasons were never far apart in seventeenth-century Scandinavia. As it will later become clear, also pragmatic and historical studies of runes often coexisted with a metaphysical orientation to the topic.

The early printing and significance of runes in Britain has received very little attention. However, it should be made clear that runes were also being advanced as important for recovering the vernacular past in early seventeenth-century Britain. The schoolmaster Reginal Bainbrigg sent a description of the runes inscribed on the Bridekirk font (Cumberland) and the Ruthwell Cross (Dumfries) to the famous antiquary William Camden. Bainbrigg was baffled at the Bridekirk runes, which he assumed to be Arabian or Syrian (PAGE 1999, 3). An illustration of the Bridekirk runes appeared in the 1607 edition of Camden's *Britannia* (1607, 632). However, here the signs are compared to the runic inscription on the Jellinge stone in Jutland, Denmark. After all, Camden was interested in the vernacular influences on British culture.

But, the runes printed in *Britannia* could not be integrated, but required a plate of separate illustration. For while a number of printers were in possession of non-Latin fonts, such as Greek and Hebrew, runes did not yet exist as moveable type in Britain. Nearly two decades later, we find runes printed in Samuel Purchas' *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), a compilation of travel and discovery writings, containing a number of plates with sign systems from around the world. Among these was a runic alphabet, which Purchas refers to as "Gotike letter". Elsewhere Purchas complains that he "could have given more complete and exact Alphabets if the cutting had not been so exceeding chargeable" (see SEATON 1935, 225).

Purchas copied the alphabet from the Icelander Arngrim Jónsson's history of Iceland, *Crymogaea sive rerum Islandicarum*, published in Hamburg in 1609, a book that does not name these signs as "runes" either. Nonetheless, this book can be taken as the beginning of what we might call modern *pragmatic* runology. Its influence in wider European circles was mostly indirect. But, it was absorbed by many who would go on to produce scholarship on runes.

Jónsson's work was about Iceland, which was a Danish island at the time, for which reason the runes were considered ethnically Danish. In Denmark, an interest in runes had been underway since the late sixteenth century. But it became a major focus for many writers of the early seventeenth.

One example of a significant use of runes is found in the poet and royal historiographer Claus Christoffersen Lyschander's work on the genealogies of Danish kings, known as *Danske Kongers Slectebog*, published in Copen-

hagen in 1622. In the first part of this book, there is a long transcription in runes about one of Noah's sons, allegedly transcribed from a monument on the Baltic island of Gotland. This inscription had no existence in fact. It is introduced to add to Lyschander's argument that a descendent of Noah had arrived in Denmark a few years after the Flood. Later in the same book, we find a transcription of a rune inscription on the Jutish king Vese from a monument near Hedeby (LYSCHANDER 1622, 23 and 35). This inscription has never been found either, and the text seems to be derived from the Danish translation of Saxo Grammaticus' Danish chronicle.

The Theories of Ole Worm

Runic printing takes a major leap forward with the Danish physician, classical scholar, and antiquarian Ole Worm (who Latinized his name Olaus Wormius). Interested in languages in his capacity as professor of Latin from 1613, and of Greek from 1615, at the University of Copenhagen, Worm's studies became widely known throughout Europe. Worm will be dealt with in some detail, since I will argue that his influence on the perception of runic writing and the ideology connected with its rediscovery in the post-Renaissance age has been underestimated. Furthermore, it is my aim to show that his misconceptions were continued in England as part of a nationalist revival there.

In a letter of 1621, Worm writes that he has seen Lyschander's runic text printed with the use of moveable type. Worm does not call Lyschander's bluff, but he does indicate that he finds Lyschander's printed runes inaccurate when compared with his own sketches of this alphabet made from observations of monuments. Worm also mentions that he has made contact with a printer, who could cut the type that he wanted (letter of 8 November 1621 to B. T. K. Aquilonius [see WORM 1965, 1: 57]).

Worm published several works on runes. He concentrated on Danish monuments, while, in the spirit of patriotism, ignoring Swedish examples (that is, he included Scania, in present-day Sweden, which was under Danish rule until 1658). In particular, Worm wanted to match Johannes Bureus' work on Swedish rune monuments. Regardless of his overt Danish patriotism, Worm's discussion of runes came to define the reception and printing of runes throughout Europe for two centuries.

In 1622, the Danish King Christian IV sent out a letter to all Danish bishops to ask their clergy to collect information about objects of national historical interest. It seems that Worm was allowed, in this letter, to add

questions about runic monuments (HENS 1976). Based on subsequent reports, Worm published *Danicorum monumentorum* (1643), which was the first attempt to record all one hundred and forty-four rune stone sites known at the time in the Danish kingdom. Each engraving of a rune stone was followed by a transcription of the inscribed runes, a transliteration into roman letters, and a translation into Latin. Worm's publisher was the renowned printer for the University of Copenhagen Melchior Martzan, an immigrant German craftsman (ILSØE 1992, 49–50). Martzan was responsible for many of Worm's publications, which, because of the polymath's linguistic interests, often contained non-roman fonts. Worm's extensive work on runes justified the maintaining of a stock of characters in moveable type. From the perspective of seventeenth-century antiquarian studies, Worm's highly illustrated works epitomize what Peter Burke has identified as the new emphasis on presenting "visual evidence" of the past (rather than only communicating history through textual description). The printing of runes is certainly an example of this (BURKE 2003: 283–84).

Worm also worked on Icelandic texts. Icelandic was seen to represent the least corrupt form of the old Gothic language. Worm refers to it as "Old Danish", since Iceland was under the Danish crown. A word list was compiled for Worm by the Icelandic scholar Magnús Ólafsson to aid him in understanding the texts on which he was working. In 1650, Worm reworked this list for publication under the title *Specimen Lexici Runici: Glossarium Prisca Lingua Danicæ*. In this edition, each entry word was transliterated into runes. These runic transliterations served to illustrate Worm's central claim: Gothic was at its root a written language. He believed that signs predated both the Latin and Greek alphabets. This theory was expounded in the work for which Worm became known throughout Europe: the Latin treatise *R̥n̥f̥l̥k̥ [Runir] seu Danica literatura antiquissima, vulgo Gothica dicta luci reddita* (Runes: or the Most Ancient Danish Letters, Popularly Called Gothic, Brought to Light) (1636 [rev. 1651]). This book, usually known as *Literatura Runica*, is divided into two sections. The main body (pp. 1–174) is a treatise on runology, while an appendix (pp. 175–249) examines Old Icelandic poetry through many examples, all translated into Latin.

Worm contended that the "Old Danish" language was traditionally called *Runa Maali* [Runic Tongue] (1632, 32), a claim for which he found evidence in Icelandic literature, where the invention of runes is mentioned in connection with the chief Norse god Odin. The thirteenth-century Icelandic scholar Snorre Sturluson had explained that Odin was not a god but an ancient chieftain who had been deified by the primitive Scandinavians, a euhemerist interpretation of Norse mythology that had been prevalent

among scholars. In the *Prose Edda*, Snorre provided a narrative of how Odin had traveled from Asia Minor—more specifically from Troy—to Scandinavia. Relying on this narrative, Worm could trace runic signs back to the eastern hemisphere and its advanced systems of ancient writing. He believed runes had an origin in Hebrew script, a theory that allowed him to link the runes with ideas current at the time that Hebrew was the original and “perfect” language.⁴ Worm claimed that the runes constituted a unique “harmony of names, forms and things”.⁵ Each rune had multiple meanings: it possessed 1) a sound value, 2) a name that began with that sound, and 3) a Danish word referring to everyday things. Each rune was believed to visualize its name abstractly, so that we see, for example, in * a snowflake, in a † ploughshare, in ‡ the god Tyr having lost his one hand to the wolf Fefnir, and in ¶ a man accepting the creation with his arms outstretched.

Beyond the pictographic and ancient origins of the runes, the sign system was also believed to have functioned as common book hand for manuscript writing in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages, before the introduction of Christianity and Latin scribal culture. It was Worm who introduced this notion to a wider European public, and he remained the major reference point for idea. Worm reasoned deductively that this presumed wealth of manuscripts could now no longer be found because they had been destroyed. In 1644, Worm explains his historical theories in a letter to Gabriel Naudé in Paris: the Christian missionaries who came to Denmark prohibited the use of runes in books in order not to have to deal with both the Roman and the Germanic system of writing in their missionary efforts. Hence, they outlawed runic books as witchcraft (SCHEPELERN 1965–1968, 3: 66).

In *Literatura Runica*, Worm quotes extensively from what is known as *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, a work composed around the middle of the thirteenth century by the Icelandic skald and scholar Óláfr Þórðarson, who applied classical grammar and rhetoric to Icelandic language and poetry. The treatise contained numerous poetic citations. When Worm selected these citations for his own work, he always transliterated them into runic script.⁶ He did this despite the fact that the Icelan-

4. These ideas in the seventeenth century have been discussed most famously by ECO 1995; see also MAAT 2004.

5. WORM 1636, 93: *nominum, figurarum & rerum harmonium*. For Worm’s analysis of the runes, see ROMBURGH (2004, 211–22).

6. For Worm’s method of quotation, see WILLS 2004.

dic manuscripts were written with the use of the roman alphabet only slightly modified for Icelandic phonetics.⁷ Worm conjecturally “back-translated” these Icelandic texts to the state in which he believed that they were first recorded. His aim was to embody visually the culture, which he believed had been a highly literate one. For Worm, the letters were emblems of Gothic literacy, independent of Latinate learning.

Worm also dealt with skaldic poetry, the skalds being the court minstrels of the North. As an appendix to the second part of his thesis, Worm transliterated two skaldic pieces of pagan poetry into runic letters: the *Death Song of Ragnarr Loðbrók* (ninth century) and the poem known as *Head Ransom* by the renowned Icelandic skald Egill Skallagrímsson (tenth century), who ransomed his own life from execution by writing this praise poem to Eric Bloodaxe, ruler of Norway and Northumbria. The runic “back-translations” were printed in the style of late medieval runes, a mixture of short-twig and long-branch runes with added dots (see Figure 1).⁸ However, in truth, the runic versions of these poems had no material existence beyond Worm’s printed edition. They were the invention of a print desire for reconstructing the documents of the past.

Even if we disregard such dubious editorial practices, the problem with Worm’s theory is that no compelling evidence can be found to indicate that a pre-Christian runic manuscript culture ever existed. There is no doubt that runes were used to record poetry. The Icelandic *Gretis saga* (ca. 1320), for example, has a reference to inscribing a poem in runes (MACLEOD and MEES 2006, 236). There are also approximately twenty-two stanzas of metrical material found on objects in Norway and Denmark, some of which can be matched with known manuscript texts (Ross 2005, 19–20). Some of these inscriptions seem to have a secondary status as ornamental iconography. In Scotland, the fragments on the Ruthwell Cross corresponding to lines from the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* are certainly Christian and should best be seen to have been carved for ornamental purposes, not as an attempt to use stone to communicate literary tradition. In sum, runes were used for recording poetry, but there is no evidence that any substantial body of such writing

7. This was an alphabet based on Roman letters with added diacriticals and other characters, the only runic letter being *thorn* (þ).

8. Changes in the shape of runes were introduced after Roman script had forced rune engravers to make their system more sophisticated to solve problems of phonetic ambiguity. The introduction of dotted or pointed runes has been described as “a capitulation to Latin writing and as such an indication of the moribund nature of the runic tradition” (THOMPSON 1974, 44).

I.

Pugnāvimus ensibus
 *INPPNY NIIR YIF *IARNI
Haud post longum tempus
 *I11 N1R 111 PNRIR RAKPN.
Cum in Gotlandia accessimus
 IR 1 P1N1M1KI P1IKYNY.
Ad serpentis immensi necem
 11 PRAW NI1IKI YARFI.
Tunc impetravimus Thoram
 P1 P1IKYNY NIIR PARN.
Ex hoc vocavit me virum
 P1P1K *111N YIF PIRP1K.
Quod serpentem transfodi
 IR NIKY1NNY MAPPAP.
Hirsutam braccam ob illam cedem
 MAPBRAY 1P PNI NIPF.
Cuspide istum intuli in colubrum
 111Y IF 1 11ARI1K NAYIN.
Ferro lucidorum stipendiorum
 111M BIAR1R1 Y1M1.

Hior. Gladius. Grafoitner, Serpens, quia terram fodit. Thora filia fuit Reguli cujusdam Gothici cujus ædes bestia hæc ambibat, vide Saxonem pag. 152. & 153. Edit. Francofurt. Firdar Virorum est appellatio. Ling Eruca. Aulum lente incedens, Lingaulum igitur dicitur serpens, quod lentè per ericeta repat. Lagdag à verbo eglegg transfodio. Stord Terra, Lykia tortuositas, hinc Stordalykia dicitur angvis, quod tortuosè per terram serpat. Mala, stipendium militare. Stal biatra mala dicit, quia stipendium quod ferrum meret lucido auro vel argento solvitur.

II.

Pugnāvimus ensibus
 *INPPNY NIIR YIF *IARNI.
Multum juvenis fui quando acquisivimus
 *ITP1NR N1R IF N1PNR IR P1IKYNY

Orien.

Figure 1.

existed. This was, however, what was suggested by Worm's practice of transliterating roman text into "original" runic letters.

One should not confuse Worm's transliteration of manuscripts in roman letters into runes with forgery. Worm never claimed that he had manuscripts of runic poems in his possession, nor did he invent new content. Nonetheless, runic transliteration became such an integral strategy in Worm's work that it passed unmarked in most places. The already existing texts were set in runes as "restorations" of what Worm presumed were unrecorded stages of a Gothic tradition. Like the theoretical reconstruction of Indo-European or other such unrecorded languages, hypothetical forms are created to illustrate what the original must have looked like. Worm worked much in the same way from having observed some extraordinary finds. A parchment containing an early fourteenth-century rune calendar had come into his possession. This was a spectacular discovery, and Worm was not slow to publish it in a printed facsimile of 1626. He also received a gift from an unnamed friend: another early fourteenth-century rune manuscript, now known as *Codex Runicus* (University of Copenhagen, Arnamagnaeae Collection AM 28 8vo). This codex contained the oldest preserved Nordic provincial legal code, Scanian Law (*Skaanske lov*), to which a younger hand had added Danish royal genealogies and a clarification of the border between Denmark and Sweden. At the end of the charter, we find the verses of the folk song *I Dreamt a Dream Last Night*, accompanied by musical notation. Most scholars consider this manuscript as a nostalgic and revivalist use of runic script. These manuscripts are best seen as calculated statements of national-antiquarian fervor, not as a natural continuation of inscription on material objects. Worm's conviction of a runic manuscript tradition could not be mistaken, but the evidence was thin on the ground. In the same letter of 1644 to his correspondent Gabriel Naudé in Paris, Worm conceded that he had only seen two runic manuscripts—the two just mentioned (SCHEPELERN 1965–1968, 3: 66). The third and only other rune manuscript known to us is the *Lamentation of Mary* from the first part of the fourteenth century, now in the Stockholm Royal Library (Stockholm, Kungliga Bibliotek A 120). This codex, which consists of six leaves in runic characters, was written in Scania (Skaane), modern-day Sweden. It experimented with the use of runes for a vernacular verse genre known in Latin as *Planctus Mariae*. Rather than evidence of a strong runic written tradition, this use of runes could be seen as an attempt to give the Latinate church a textual outreach. Not only does the text have a Latin original of which the vernacular version is derivative, but a number of errors suggest that it was copied from a previous source in

roman script (BRØNDUM-NIELSEN and ROHMANN, 1929, 37). Furthermore, the similar shape of the runes written by the second of the two hands in the *Lamentation of Mary* and the runes in *Codex Runicus* has led some historians to suggest that we are dealing with a limited attempt at reviving runes, perhaps confined to a single scriptorium, in early fourteenth-century Scania (FREDERIKSEN 2003, 819–23).

Other evidence is purely circumstantial. Worm would have read in Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus Septentrionalibus* that Magnus had knowledge of presumably religious runic manuscripts at Skara and Uppsala Cathedrals, as well as other important places in Sweden (MAGNUS [1555] 1972, 55). However, no evidence of such widespread practices has survived. Magnus' nationalist fervor for promoting Sweden's treasures of a glorious past gives reason to treat his claim of the wide dissemination of runes with some scepticism. That runes were never seriously adopted for the recording of manuscript text is made clear by the fact that they never developed into a cursive script, which facilitates the writing of longer texts, as the scribe does not have to lift the quill from the parchment.⁹ Runes seem to have remained primarily epigraphic.

Nonetheless, Worm's theories and practices fostered a long legacy of inauthentic runes in print (i.e., runic versions of Icelandic words found originally only in the roman alphabet). One of Worm's regular correspondents was the royal Danish historiographer Stephanus Stephanius, who published the work *Notae uberiores in historiam Danicam Saxonis grammatici* (1645), a commentary on Saxo Grammaticus' Danish chronicle. Stephanius included several copperplate engravings of the runic monuments that Saxo mentions in his work. He also included runic transliterations of words and concepts taken from manuscripts of the *Prose Edda* and skaldic poetry. Stephanius' book was printed by Henrik Kruse, official printer to the Sorø Academy, an important Danish institution of learning. Kruse was famous for his printing of music, which was long considered a difficult discipline in the early history of the book printing. The work Kruse did for Stephanius shows the perfect integration of runic script within the running text of roman characters. Conceptually, this gives the rune signs parity of status with roman types. Such printing practices were adopted elsewhere in Europe and can also be seen in the work of Jan Van Vliet, the pioneer of German philology in the Netherlands (DEKKER 1999, 238).

9. There were idiosyncratic adaptations of the runic alphabet to a cursive format, an example of which comes from a manuscript (1543–1544) written by the Danish court official Bent Bille; see HAGLAND 2006.

Worm's belief in runes as a common manuscript alphabet was so influential that a new term was coined: runic. Evidence of its usage for what today is known as Old Norse can be found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English, German, and French texts (WILLS 2004, 455 and n16). But Worm's hypothesis also came to shape the perception of the cultural past. The important seventeenth-century historian and writer Sir William Temple explains in an essay of 1690: "Runes were properly the Name of the ancient Gothic letters or characters [. . .] But, because all the writings they had among them of many ages were in verse, it came to be the common name of all sorts of poetry among the Goths" (1696, 240). In another essay, Temple uses the term "Runick Poetry" to describe two cited stanzas from the Latin translation of Ragnarr Loðbrók's *Death Song*, copied from Worm's Latin translation of the poem. The adjective "runic" became integrally connected with Norse poetry, as we shall see in connection with Thomas Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry Translated from the Islandic Language* (1763), an anthology of Old Norse skaldic poetry, or Thomas James Mathias' *Runic Odes: Imitated from the Norse Tongue in the Manner of Mr. Gray* (1781 [first edition]), containing translations from the *Poetic Edda*.

Runes on English Presses

In Britain, from the late seventeenth century, runes were taken up as part of the wider discovery of the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic, or Gothic, past. It was generally held that since a process of Christianization had begun in England already from the late sixth century, pagan Gothic poetry, and the runes in which it may have been written, had been eradicated. Icelandic heroic texts, however, were believed to preserve the principles, religious attitudes, and heroic perceptions of the ancient Gothic people. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there was thus a notable focus on Old Norse texts, either through translation or adaptation.¹⁰ The recourse to Icelandic texts in England should also be seen in the light of the scarcity of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry available at the time. Notably, the *Beowulf* manuscript was not made publicly available until it was printed in a Copenhagen edition of 1815.

One example of writing Anglo-Saxon history with the help of Icelandic manuscripts can be found in the Cambridge linguist Robert Sheringham's Latin treatise *De Anglorum gentis origine* (1670). Sheringham prints an

10. An older but still valuable survey of these compositions is found in FARLEY 1903.

Origine Disceptatio.

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guere, tempestates sedare, inundationes sistere, ventos ad arbitrium suum immittere, unico verbo potuit. Defunctorum manes subinde eliciens, alio translatos collibus & monticulis inclussit: Unde

ÞRANÞA ÞRANÞA Dronga Drotten,

vel **ÞRANÞA ÞRANÞA** Honga drotten,

hoc est, lemurum dominus dictus est. Binos habuit corvos humani eloquii usum ab ipso edoctos, qui disitaloca pervolantes, hero suo copiosam rerum novarum seriem renunciabant. Apertis denique magicâ montibus, aurum & argentum ex abditis terræ venis pro lubitu deprompsit, & absconditos insuper thesauros, nemine monstrante, eruit. Ad summam, Othinus runis suis & carminibus

ac incantationibus (quæ **ÞANÞAN** Cal-

dran, **ÞANÞA**, Seid, **ÞANÞA** Liod,

ÞANÞANÞA, Fiolkinga dicebantur) in-

credibilia patrando, tam clarum sibi ubique nomen peperit, ut fama sapientie & potentie Othiniana, juxta ac Asianorum per omnes gentes & nationes brevi spatio sit dedita. Quare hostes ita conterruit, ut nihil adversus eum moliri ausi fuerint; sed è diverso socios & amicos ita in fide retinuit, ut rarò aut nunquam ab eo desiverint. Quo evenit, ut Sueci, alique populi Boreales, Othino pariter, ac duodecim ejus complicitibus solennia sacrificia dependerent, & cultum vero cæli terræque

Q 3

Domino

Figure 2.

extract from Ragnarr Loðbrók's epicedium in runic letters, which is copied from Worm's *Literatura Runica*, as is his extract from the *Poetic Edda*, the so-called *Rúnatal*, which is the section dealing with Odin's discovery of runes. Sheringham's Cambridge printer John Hayes—who advertised himself as *celeberrimae* on the title page—was not in possession of runic metal type pieces. So the runic font used in the book was the result of crudely designed woodcuts. The difficulty of aligning the runes with roman letters in the running text is obvious (see Figure 2). The Greek and Hebrew letters, already available in moveable type, elsewhere in the book presented, of course, no problem. In fact, Scandinavian printers showed the two alphabets as equally suited for the print medium. On the other hand, Hayes' runes are wonky and oversized insets. His lack of typographical control emphasizes the primitiveness of the runes, a cultural contrast to Sheringham's notion of a noble and cultured North.

One of the runic insets is the word *Asamal* (SHERINGHAM 1670, 285), the name of the language spoken by Odin and the other characters in Norse mythology. These runes do not refer to any known inscriptions but are copied from Scandinavian scholarly print editions. Sheringham also conveyed misguided theories about the text embodied in runes. In “*asamal*” he understood the “language of the Asians”. However, this claim predates print. In the prologue to the manuscript of his *Prose Edda* (c. 1220), Snorre Sturlasson has Odin placed in a homeland of mythical Troy. Thus Snorre's purpose to de-barbarize the Germanic language. However, the etymology is false. The first part of the compound is related not to a geographical location, but to the Old Norse word for god: *áss*. Snorre had not used runes in his handwritten manuscript. The transliteration into the runic alphabet was an invention of print culture to create the additional impression of a highly literate civilization in the North. This attempt was connected to the idea that the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of alliterative poems that had been passed down orally for centuries, had existed as runic texts.¹¹ The same claim was made in English publications well into the nineteenth century.¹²

Aylett Sammes, a lawyer who turned to antiquarian research, also took up the Norse tradition as a surrogate for the lack of documentation of

11. The most significant manuscript of the poems is *Codex Regius*, which is thought to have been written in the 1270s. The writing is in the roman alphabet.

12. See PIGOTT 1839, XLIII; MILES 1854, 271–72; *Eddas* 1866, 70. For a refutation of the theory, see WHEATON 1831, 61. In modern criticism, the possibility of runic preservation has been taken up again by STEFFENSEN 1968.

an Anglo-Saxon tradition prior to their conversion. In *The Antiquities of Ancient Britain* (1676), he adopts Worm's claims of the widespread use of runic manuscripts. He even suggested that people had "burnt without distinction, all sorts of Books written in that [runic] Letter" after the introduction of Christianity (1676, 439). Typographically, Sammes work is derivative when it comes to the Norse material. He copies Sheringham's selection of Icelandic poems and the stanzas from Worm's runicized version of Ragnar's ode (SAMMES 1676, 436; cf. SHERINGHAM 1670, 322). However, Sammes had the benefit of working with the prestigious printer Thomas Roycroft, whom Charles II had appointed as the King's Printer of Oriental languages. Compared to Sheringham's book, the handling of the runic letters is smoother, partly because they are printed in separate blocks, nor is there any attempt to incorporate these letters in the running text of roman type.

While both used Cambridge printers, Sheringham and Sammes struggled with woodcuts. The University of Oxford had received a head start through Franciscus Junius, a Dutch pioneer of Germanic philology, who was a resident in England for many years. Junius published print editions of a number of important manuscripts. For this endeavor, he was in need of special types. On 5 August 1654, Junius wrote from Amsterdam to the jurist and antiquarian John Selden in London that he had ordered the cutting of "Anglo-Saxonick" puncheons to produce moveable type for printing (ROMBURGH 2004, 848–50). Junius later expanded his stock to include a number of specialist alphabets, including a "pica-runic" font, modeled on the printed runes in Worm's *Literatura Runica* Dekker (DEKKER 1999, 245n).¹³ These moveable types were in all probability produced by the highly regarded punch cutter and print designer Christoffel van Dyck.¹⁴ But Junius was cost conscious; the three runes whose morphology resembles the roman letters *R*, *I*, and *B* are taken from the roman casts fonts.

In 1665, Junius published an edition of the gospels from Anglo-Saxon and Gothic (i.e., the peculiar letters of Ulfilas' fourth-century Bible) sources. This publication was appended specimens of various alphabets, among them an "Alphabetum Runicum". This alphabet was in moveable type and was followed by a reproduction of an Icelandic song (in inauthentic runes) taken from the nineteenth chapter of Worm's work. Junius bequeathed his special types to the University of Oxford in 1677, the year of his death.

13. Junius' full range of the "pica-runic" font is displayed in *SPECIMEN* 1706.

14. For an account of Junius' types, see LUCAS 1998, 179 and 190.

At Oxford, there seems to have been no initial interest in these moveable types after Junius' death, so they disappeared for a while. Nichols (1812, 146) narrates the anecdote that the types were stacked away in the study of the Oriental scholar Thomas Hyde of Kings College, who believed that "they were Ethiopic" until the Anglo-Saxon scholar Edward Thwaites corrected him: "they were Gothic and Runic punchions".¹⁵

The runic font was used in Christopher Rawlinson's edition of Alfred's version of Boethius (1698), the *Oratio Dominica* (1700), and even more notably by the Oxford linguist George Hickes in his monumental miscellany *Linguarum vett. septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archæologicus* (1703–1705), usually known by its short title as *Thesaurus*. The third section of the first volume is an Icelandic grammar entitled *Grammaticae Islandicae Rudimenta*, which was a re-publication of a work by the Icelander Rúnolfur Jónsson. In Hickes' re-issued version, the grammar was prefaced with a number of plates of runic alphabets that display facsimiles taken from a mixture of inscriptions on monuments in Scandinavia and England, from manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, and print reproductions from a number of bibliophiles and scholars, such as Nicolaus Petri, Wolfgang Lazio, Jonas Arngrim, and Ole Worm. This collection of different forms led the English antiquarian Francis Wise to comment: "What shall we say to the liberty, that has been taken with this alphabet, by distorting the forms?" Wise lamented that the simplicity of runes had been misrepresented by carelessness in reproduction, making the "inscriptions unintelligible" (Wise 1758, 126n). Wise printed his work at the Sheldonian Theatre, then the home of the Oxford University printing press. To counter the wayward representations of runic writing, Wise includes a display of Junius' neat "pica-runic" type (see p. 127). However, fixing rune signs in a fixed form of moveable metal font was itself a significant distortion. It fixed a system of inscription that was widely varied in its original appearance. The fixedness of metal type made it impossible to register the individuality of or variance between singular inscriptions. Hickes was aware of this problem. So when he presented the famous Anglo-Saxon rune poem in the *Thesaurus*, he chose to engrave the runes, while printing the accompanying Anglo-Saxon verse lines in moveable type. The original manuscript was lost in the famous Cotton Library fire of 1731, making page 35 of the *Thesaurus* the only extant impression. In the introduction to the poem on the previous page, Hickes comments on the necessity of

15. The story apparently comes from a letter of 10 August 1697 from Dr. Tanner to Dr. Charlett.

presenting the rune poem in full to the public despite the “trouble and expense” (*operae & sumptus*) that he incurred to do so.

Wise followed Worm some of the way towards assigning an ancient provenance to runes. However, he rejected that they were older than Greek letters. Hickes had gone further and seen them as entirely derivative. In an appendix, Hickes has a table showing how runes could have morphed from Greek and Roman characters. It is important to the disagreements with Worm. Throughout the eighteenth century, Worm remained the authority to which every writer on runes had to relate in one way or another.

In the *Thesaurus*, Hickes rejected fantasies of the ancient origins of runes, but he did publish one runic sensation. A significant section of his first volume is dedicated to the runic manuscript of *Hjalmars saga*. The interest in this text was considerable; here was—finally—an extant example of a runic literary text in manuscript, which Worm and others had believed were once widespread. Hickes was made aware of the saga through his contact with the keeper of national antiquities in Sweden, Johan Peringskjöld. The runes of the damaged manuscript had first been brought to public attention in 1690 by Lucas Halpap, a student of the University of Uppsala. Halpap claimed to have bought it from a farmer in Uppland, eastern Sweden. Hickes re-printed much of Peringskjöld's edition as a facsimile. The runic pages were interspersed with a transliteration into Latin letters, replete with the simulated lacunas of the damaged manuscript (HICKES 1703, 122–59). The translations were in two columns, Icelandic and Latin, respectively cast in blackletter and roman type, clearly showing the connection between typography and cultural identity.¹⁶

Swedish antiquarians assigned the fragment to a time of composition at anything between the seventh and the twelfth century, although doubts about the validity of the manuscript were also raised from the beginning. It only slowly became clear, in the course of the eighteenth century, that the manuscript was a counterfeit produced in the service of claiming that Nordic runes had rivalled Latin manuscript culture. But it was not until as late as 1774 that the language of the fragment was finally exposed as a forgery (see NORDIN 1774).¹⁷

16. For considerations of the connection between blackletter and cultural/Germanic identity, see essays in BAIN and SHAW 1998.

17. Gödel (1895) surmised that it was not Halpap, the student, but most probably C. Lundius and the circle around the Swedish nationalist antiquarian Olaus Rudbeck who were the real perpetrators of the forgery.

Thomas Percy's Runic Poetry

The work of Ole Worm was absorbed by Thomas Percy, one of the most influential popularizers of medieval literature in eighteenth-century Britain.¹⁸ Today, he is best known for his three-volume collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (first published 1765), but this was preceded by the smaller anthology entitled *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763), for which he sold the rights to the bookseller John Dodsley for 10 guineas on 21 May 1761 (TIERNEY 2004, 563). Like Sheringham, Sammes, Temple and other English antiquarians, Percy used Old Norse poetry as a window to the Anglo-Saxon heroic tradition.

Percy is candid about his motives for publishing ancient Germanic poetry, writing in his preface: "It would be as vain to deny, as it is perhaps impolitic to mention that this attempt is owing to the success of Macpherson's *Fragments*" (PERCY 1763, v).¹⁹ The Scottish antiquarian James Macpherson's alleged translations of the third-century Gaelic bard Ossian into English (1760) had become bestsellers. In a letter of 4 December 1761, Percy's literary mentor, the poetaster William Shenstone, reproached Percy for delaying the publication of *Five Pieces* until Macpherson had published his *Fingal* (late 1761). Percy was blamed for failing to avail himself of an opportunity in an antiquarian book market characterized by conspicuous consumption.²⁰

Percy subscribed to Worm's theory of a runic manuscript culture. For Percy the essence of "runic poetry" derives from the script: "The Characters, in which this language was originally written, were called Runic [. . .] at first applied to the letters only: tho' later writers have extended it to the verses written in them" (PERCY 1763, iv). On the title page he prints four rune lines, copied from the two skaldic poems Worm had printed in the appendix to *Literatura Runica*. This re-deployment served a specific and polemical purpose in the context of the mid eighteenth-century book market. Specifically, his printing of runes was aimed at giving his publica-

18. Indications in a manuscript in the Bodleian library demonstrate that Percy had borrowed Worm's volume of *Literatura Runica* from the library of his neighbour Lord Sussex on 3 October 1761, returning it on 11 July (ROSS and COLLINS 2004, 262).

19. I have added page numbers to the unpaginated "Preface".

20. See BROOKS 1977, 124: "Why will you suffer the Publick to be quite cloyed with this kind of writing [Macpherson's translation], ere you avail yourself of their *Appetite*".

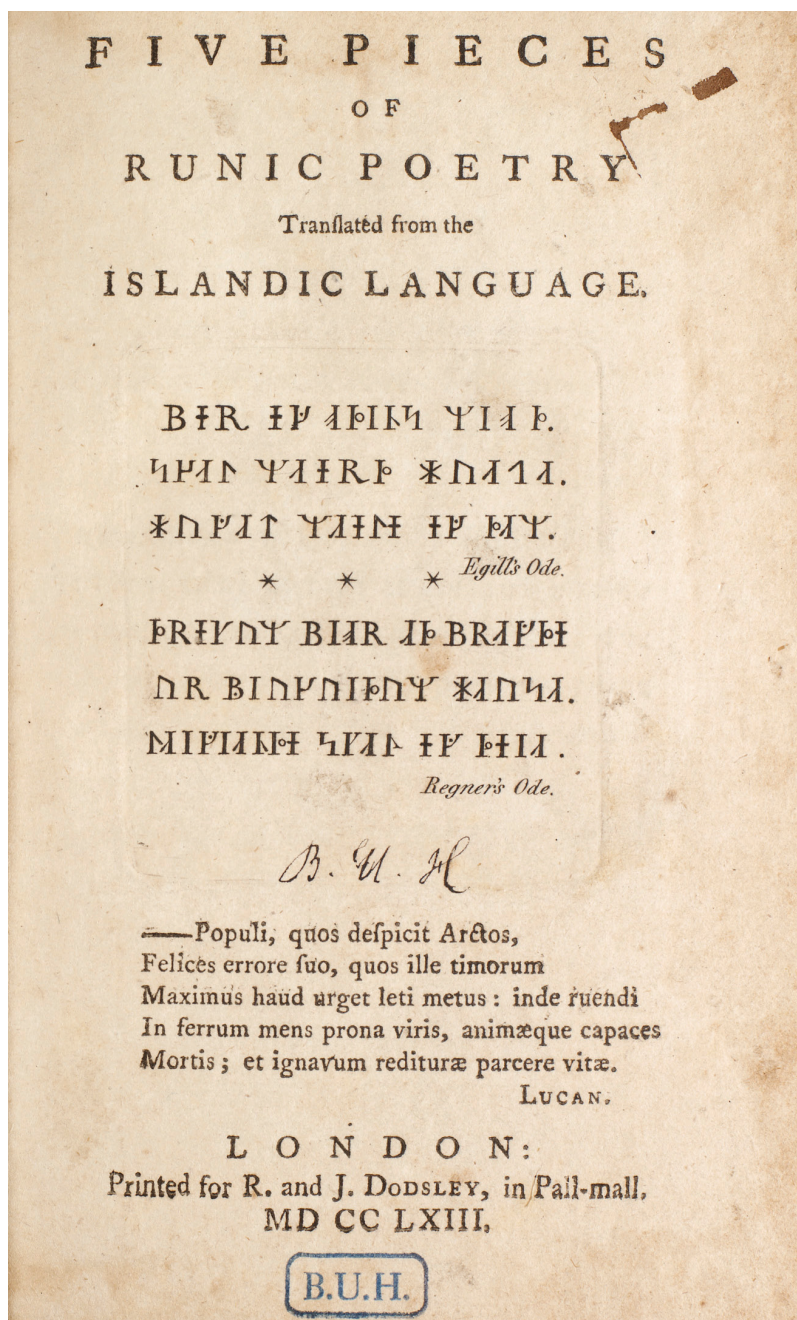


Figure 3.

tion an edge over James Macpherson's *Fragments*, while copying the design of the title page of Macpherson's book, even down to quoting the Roman poet Lucan (Ross 1998, 60 and 62). The only difference was the runic citations (see Figure 3).

While it is not in the scope of this article to examine the controversy which developed over the poems which Macpherson claimed were uncorrupted representations of the third-century Gaelic Ossian, we should note that the debate over the genuineness of Macpherson's English prose translations was a heated one. The Ossianic poems became the object of a national row, in which English writers accused Macpherson of promoting Scottish nationalism, if not the Jacobite cause (CORNELL 2006).²¹ Percy did not join the politicized chorus of English critics; but, in the preface to *Five Pieces*, he maintains that the public's suspicion "will not be eradicated until the Translator of those poems [Macpherson] thinks it proper to produce his originals" (PERCY 1763, vi). But Macpherson always claimed that his main sources were oral tales of unlettered Highlanders. Nevertheless, Macpherson added a twenty-page appendix to the epic *Temora* (1763), entitled "A Specimen of the Original of *Temora*". In Gaelic, transcribed in the roman alphabet with added accents used in Gaelic orthography, this was—as we recall—Macpherson's "back translation" we discussed earlier. Macpherson gave no information about the manuscript's provenance. But he does note that he has normalized the codex's irregular spellings, which lends a sense of authenticity. But, according to Macpherson, orthography was not the problem, typography was, complaining about the predominance of roman type: "[Gaelic] language is put to the severest test, when it is stripped of its own proper characters; especially when the power [i.e., sound] of *one* of them requires sometimes a combination of two or three Roman letters to express it" (1763, 226). Here, Macpherson seems to be referring to manuscripts composed in the Gaelic manuscript hand known as *corr litir*.

Macpherson himself seems aware why this specimen failed to convince his contemporaries: the lack of proper type fonts. This problem was taken up in 1807, when a substantial part of the Ossian oeuvre was published in Gaelic by Macpherson's supporters in the Highland Society of London. The Scottish economist and politician, Sir John Sinclair wrote an introduction in which he included an account of how Macpherson had

21. Modern opinion has reached the conclusion that Macpherson had some sources at his disposal, but that he assembled, sentimentalized, and added at will (McKEAN 2001).

“attempted to simplify the Gaelic orthography and proposed to have the original printed in that style”. However, this was found “too arduous to be accomplished” and was abandoned. Allegedly, other ways of authenticating the Gaelic version were considered. Macpherson believed that “it would be better to print the Gaelic originals in the Grecian rather than the Roman characters”, and “a specimen in Greek” was allegedly printed. However, the editors realized that “the difficulty of converting above ten thousand lines into the Greek character joined to the circumstance that in that state the work would be intelligible only to scholars rendered the Roman character preferable”. Some of this specimen was made available in the 1807 volume.²²

These considerations point to Macpherson’s and others’ preoccupation with typography as an essential vehicle for communicating ancient manuscripts in print. Like Macpherson, Percy wanted to show his readers that his sources were genuine. Worm’s notion that Icelandic pre-Christian poetry had been written in runes made credible the claim that the corruption endemic to oral cultures had been arrested. Hence, by printing runic lines on the title page, Percy testified to the materiality of the verses that he translated, while simultaneously disparaging the dubious orality of Macpherson’s examples.

Percy refers to the help he received from the Anglo-Saxon scholar Edward Lye (who is, however, not mentioned by name) in translating the Icelandic originals. Lye had himself used Junius’ runic types in the edition of this scholar’s manuscript etymological dictionary of the English language, *Etymologicum Anglicanum*, which he prepared for publication in 1743 (runic font appears on pp. 561–62). Whereas Lye had published at Oxford’s Sheldonian Theatre, Percy’s commercial publishers, the well-known commercial booksellers Robert and John Dodsley, were not in possession of special moveable types. The runes were printed from a plate, whose embossment is clearly notable in the paper of the title page.

The runes on the title page were copied from Worm’s transcription of Egill Skallagimsson’s poems *Höfuðlausn* and *Krákumál*. These appeared in Percy’s English translations in the anthology as *The Ransome of Egil the*

22. Macpherson had apparently considered using Greek characters after reading Gaius Julius Caesar’s *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*. Book I, chapter 21 describes a muster roll of the Helvetians, a Celtic tribe, that was written in Greek characters (see SINCLAIR 1807, LXXXIX–LXC). Macpherson wrote to Adam Ferguson 21 May 1793: “I have resolved to follow the example of the old druids in writing in the Celtic language in Greek characters” (SAUNDERS 1894, 295).

Scald and *The Dying Ode of Regner Lodbrog* respectively. The first three lines are from *Ransome: berk Óðins mjöð* (“I carry the mead of Odin” [i.e., a reference to having poetic skill]), *skal mæð hvata* (“I shall hasten with praise”). Percy evidently chose these quotes as illustrations of what he refers to as the old northerners’ “amazing fondness for poetry” (11). The same goes for the quote from *Ransome: hugat mælik þar* (literally, “I speak what I have thought”), which Percy translates as “The song flows from my heart”. The last two runic citations are from *Regnar: Drekkum bjór af bragði/ ór bjúgvíðum hausa* (“we shall drink beer out of the skulls”) and *læjandi skalk deyja* (“laughing I shall die”), which focus on the Gothic warriors’ extraordinary bravery and legendary death-defiance. None of these sentences had any runic original beyond Worm’s printed edition.

We may consider *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* as a publication accommodated to the demands of a literary market becoming increasingly alert to forgeries. Percy’s anthology balanced the market demands of providing easy access to vernacular antiquities while advertising his scholarly integrity in every possible way. If the runic title page was beyond the comprehension of all but a few learned scholars in Britain, it did great service as a sales pitch, striking a contrast to Macpherson’s unadorned title page. It is ironic, of course, that in his zeal to give his publication the required stamp of authenticity Percy perpetuated the kind of *faux* of missing originals which he had set out to discredit.

Percy’s printed runes on the frontispiece had provided more of the aura and reverence of old manuscripts than Macpherson had achieved. But the runic sentences had never existed outside of print. To further substantiate the genuineness of his publications, Percy decided to append transcripts of his Icelandic originals at the back of *Five Pieces*. This did not use Icelandic special types (not even accents), but respellings in the standard Latin alphabet. This decision was against the wishes of William Shenstone, who had advised him to produce a volume for the commercial market and therefore advocated against any poem that required notes (letter of 1 October 1760 [see BROOKS 1977, 74]). But after Shenstone’s death in February of 1763 and the mounting public attacks on Ossian, it appeared that the climate of the book market dictated new measures.

Percy notified his readers that the Icelandic transcripts served as “vouchers for the authenticity of his versions”, expressing the hope that the Icelandic transcription “will not be thought a useless encumbrance to the reader” (1763, xii). However, from his personal correspondence it is clear that Percy included the Icelandic originals to showcase his editorial integrity. In a letter to Shenstone, he admitted that there was little point

in printing the originals, since “nobody will understand” them (September 1761 [see BROOKS 1977, 71]).

For Percy, the display of manuscript transcriptions, and especially the samples of their supposed runic original, had further ethnic ramifications. These became evident in relation to Percy’s English translation of the works of Paul-Henri Mallet. In the mid-1750s, Mallet—then in Copenhagen—was commissioned by the Danish government to write two works: one on Scandinavian history and one on poetry. From these, Percy issued a two-volume edition entitled *Northern Antiquities*. Significantly, the subtitle advertised it not only as Scandinavian antiquarianism but as history “including [. . .] our own Saxon ancestors”. This phrase refers to the Gothic culture at large, rather than Mallet’s concrete discussions of the Anglo-Saxons, whom he only mentions in passing.

Mallet had committed the same mistake as previous scholars concerned with the north of Europe. He confounded Celtic and Germanic pasts, most notably making the druids (a specific Celtic priesthood) part of Germanic religious culture. We find a similar confusion in Johann Georg Keyser’s *Antiquitates selectae Septrionales et Celtae* (Hannover 1720) and Simon Pelloutier’s *Histoire des Celtes* (La Haye 1750). Percy found this imprecision a grave mistake in need of correction. In his “Translator’s Preface” to the English translation of Mallet, he clarifies the ethnographic fault line: Goths and Celts were “two races of men *ab origine* distinct” (PERCY 1770, xix). Percy’s whole preface is an extensive correction of the author’s indiscriminate use of the adjective “Celtic” applied to the ancient Scandinavians. Throughout his otherwise faithful translation of Mallet’s French original, Percy appears to intervene heavily, adding the term “Gothic” (Germanic) in inverted commas whenever appropriate, and introducing contradictory evidence in the form of extensive marginal notes to correct Mallet’s mistakes.

Percy describes the Druids as a sacred college of priests, who “concealed their doctrines from the laity forbidding that they should ever be committed to writing and upon that account not having so much as an alphabet of their own”.²³ In contrast, the institutions of the Germanic peoples did not

23. Percy annotates this attack on the Celtic past utilizing Caesar’s *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* 6.4, in which Caesar says of the Celtic Druids: “They consider it improper to entrust their studies to writing, although they use the Greek alphabet in nearly everything else, in their public and private accounts” (see DUDDY 1996, 14).

use secret writing, Percy claims. For him their public inscription in runes was a democratizing technology:

No barbarous people were so addicted to writing as appears from the innumerable quantity of Runic inscriptions scattered all over the north no barbarous people ever held letters in higher reverence ascribing the invention of them to their chief deity and attributing to the letters themselves supernatural virtues.

(PERCY 1770, XII–XIII)

It is reasonable here to suggest that Percy, a Church of England clergyman, draws an implicit parallel between the druidic concealment and what Protestants claimed as the abhorrent Roman Catholic predilection for secrecy and episcopacy. He praises the Gothic approach to religion as one in which their doctrines were never “locked up or concealed from any part of the community”, and that there “never existed any institution in which there appears less of reserve and mystery than in that of the Gothic and Scandinavian people”. The runic inscriptions that were found in Scandinavia and England may bear comparison with the Lutheran translations of the Bible, which were printed in the vernacular and made cheaply available in enormous quantities throughout the German-speaking territories, to break the priests’ monopoly on interpreting the Latin text.

Percy’s anti-Celtic argument seems a well-rehearsed notion of Gothic liberty, one which had abounded in politico-historical scholarship since the seventeenth century (see KIDD 1999, 211–68): “[t]he Celtic nations do not appear to have had that equal plan of liberty, which was the peculiar honour of all the Gothic tribes” (PERCY 1770, XII–XIII).

In this connection, it is worth noting that Percy, in his added notes, takes the meaning of the word *rune* from the beginning of Worm’s *Litteratura Runica*, as etymologically related to the Germanic *ryn*, with the meaning of “furrow” or *ren*, a “gutter” or “channel” (MALLETT 1770, 363n). He stood by this etymology despite the fact that English writers before him had more correctly traced the word to the Old English *run*, which meant “mystery”, “whispering”, or “secret”.²⁴ However, the idea of secrecy and mystery was not compatible with libertarian ideals that Percy wanted to connect with Gothic literacy.

24. The English antiquarian Henry Spelman had argued against Ole Worm’s idea in their correspondence on this issue; see SEATON 1935, 226. Cf. SAMMES 1676, 440–41; and WISE 1768, 126.

* An evident proof that the Runic were not imitated from the Roman letters, arises not only from their form which have so little resemblance to these, but from their number, (being but sixteen) and their order and names, which have nothing in common with the Roman, Greek or Gothic characters of Ulfphilas: Let the reader trust to his own eyes.

The Runic Alphabet.

Name,	Fic	Ur	Dufs	Oys	Ridhur	Kaun	Hagl
Figure,							
Power,	F.	U.	D.	O.	R.	K.	H.
	Nandur	Jis	Aar	Sol	Tyr	Biarkan	
							
	N.	I.	A.	S.	T.	B.	
	Lagur	Madur	Yr				
							
	L.	M.	YR.				

Figure 4.

In his footnotes, Percy challenges Hickes' attempt to trace the shape of runic letters back to roman alphabets. Percy even adds a plate to Mallet's text, which shows the incommensurability of runic and other alphabets. It is worth noting that the runes *Ridhur* and *Biarkan* were in particular cut in angular versions that vary considerably from their of roman alphabet equivalents (MALLET 1770, 365 and 370 [see Figure 4]). For the same letters, Junius had been cost effective, choosing to use ordinary *R* and *B* types from the roman set of fonts that he already had at his disposal. However, defamiliarizing the shape of the runes was useful and necessary for Percy's argument. In this case, fixed forms in moveable type would distort his line of reasoning.

The print incarnation of runes was meant to restore the texts to their original state. For Worm, print was a technology that allowed a re-construction of what was presumably lost. It allowed him to display a literate

culture independent of Latin learning. He produced a usable past for the Gothic peoples. Gothic history was re-created by reforming its texts into iconographic representations of past documents as they were imagined to have existed. However, the printed runes were a *simulacrum*, to borrow Jean Baudrillard's well-known term. By copying what was presumed to have existed, but most likely never did, he made the copy precede the original. When Percy displayed a facsimile of Worm's printed runes on the title page of his *Five Pieces*, he provided a copy of a copy, obscuring further the relation to an "original". The appeal of facsimile, as a direct access to the source came under scrutiny later in the 1760s, when the British Parliament allocated funds for a facsimile reproduction of the *Domesday Book*, one of England's most precious medieval documents. Debates ensued over the use moveable type or engraving for the reproduction. The debates brought to attention antiquarian anxieties of accuracy and aesthetics when duplicating old documents (LOLLA 2002). The printing of runes had an affective value. As a non-roman script, the appearance of runes indicated something beyond quotation. If a cited passage appeared in roman letters, the reader could imagine various interferences and inaccuracies. Printing the unfamiliar runic signs signaled something close to facsimile reproduction: a physical representation of an original, whereas roman type was only an abstract signifier always pointing beyond itself. This perception was what made printed runes so effective. They were privileged triggers of memory and fancy through which a collective identity of a literate Gothic past could be recaptured.

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